



WORLD BOOK Illustration by Walter Maston

**Famous Ranch Brands of the Old West.** Branding cattle was very important in the 1800's, when cattle roamed on open (unfenced) range. The brand on each animal showed who owned it. Branding also made it difficult for *rustlers* (thieves) to steal cattle and sell them as their own.

Neighbors help each other when extra help is needed. Only the largest ranches still employ cowhands.

**Life on a Cattle Ranch** centers on raising calves that are sold as *feeder cattle* to people called *feeders*. After the animals are fattened, they are called *slaughter cattle* and are shipped to a *stockyard* (market) where they are sold and slaughtered for meat. The rancher usually keeps some calves to replace older cows.

Ranchers start their year in the fall after selling their calves. They prepare for winter by buying or harvesting a hay crop and such feed grains as barley and oats. When snow covers the ground during the winter, the cattle cannot find food by themselves. Ranchers then carry feed out to their cattle in a truck and spread it on the ground for them to eat.

Many of the cows give birth to calves in early spring, and the rancher must watch them closely then. If a calf becomes ill, the rancher may move the calf and its mother in from the fields to the ranch headquarters to treat the calf. A month or two later, when the calves are active and strong, neighbors help the rancher round up the cattle and herd them into a small fenced area called a *corral*. There the calves are *branded* (marked) with a hot iron to show who owns them. They are also given medicine to prevent diseases. During the rest of the spring and summer, the herd *grazes* (eats grass) on the range.

The cattle follow a daily routine on the range. They graze very early in the morning, eating very rapidly. They chew their food only enough to moisten it and then swallow it. During the middle of the day, the cattle rest in a shady place. The food is returned to their

mouths in the form of a *cud*, and they chew it again. In late afternoon, most of the cattle go to the watering hole to drink. They then graze until dusk.

During the day, ranchers mend fences, repair machinery, and make sure the watering holes contain enough water for their cattle. They also put out blocks of salt that the cows can lick, because cattle need salt in their diet. Ranchers also plant and care for their hay and grain crops. In the fall, neighbors help each other round up the cattle. Then the calves that are old enough to be *weaned* (taken from their mothers) are sold.

Ranch life once was lonely. But the automobile, truck, and good roads have brought the rancher closer to other people. Ranchers usually go to town at least once a week, and they visit their neighbors frequently. Most ranch children ride school buses to school in nearby towns. Ranch families now live in comfortable homes that have electricity, modern plumbing, a telephone, and, usually, a television set.

**Life on a Sheep Ranch** is different from life on a cattle ranch because sheep produce two crops—lambs and wool. In the spring, crews of workers use power clippers to *shear* (cut off) the sheep's wool and the rancher sells it. Lambs are usually born in spring. They and the freshly sheared sheep are then branded with paint. In the fall, most of the lambs are weaned, shipped to stockyards, and sold.

**History.** Ranching in the United States began in the mid-1800's. The ranchers raised cattle on the open range, and hired cowhands to guard and herd the cattle.

When the cattle were almost ready for slaughter, the ranchers formed big herds and drove them overland to

## Cattle Brands

See cattle  
brand  
office

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